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ABSTRACT

The spring of 1995 brought the onus of assessment to the Department of Communication Arts at Ohio Northern University (ONU). Often seen as a painful process, departmental assessments can become productive endeavors. Although, as a private institution, ONU is not subject to the dictates for assessment from the State Board of Education, assessment procedures have been built into the institutional structure. At ONU, assessment involves the process of self-examination by the college faculties, assisted by the Office of Institutional Research. Assessment of student learning outcomes at ONU is built upon a decentralized approach initiated at the level of the individual major program. All must be consistent with the University and respective college and department mission statements. The highest tier in the University's assessment structure is the University Assessment Committee. Next are the respective college assessment committees. The third level is the Department of Communication Arts, which created a successful and productive assessment plan for the Speech Communication Concentration including a goal statement, learning outcomes with assessment thereof, assessment benchmarks, program evaluation, and a matrix for assessment. The initial onus of assessment as imposition and threat has, indeed, become an opportunity for faculty and students to engage in a productive endeavor. (CR)

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DEPARTMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

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DEPARTMENTAL ASSESSMENT:
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Assessment: noun. From assess v.t. [from L. *assessus*, pp. of *assidere*, to sit beside, assist]. 1. estimated value of property for taxation. 2. the amount of damages, a fine. 3. a special payment imposed on a person or property. 4. an anxiety-producing task ordained, dictated, decreed, enjoined, ordered, charged, required by university higher-administration for academic departments. To enact assessment, the department must assay, approve, evaluate, rate, calculate, estimate, compute, or simply reckon.

The spring of 1995 brought the onus of assessment to the Department of Communication Arts at Ohio Northern University. Department meetings normally concerned with reports from the five concentrations, admissions duty dates, the next entertainer in the headliner series in the Performing Arts Center, recent conference travels, and who's to bring the potato salad to the upcoming faculty and staff picnic were given over to the angst of assessment. From the higher realms of academe, i.e. President, Vice-President, Associate Vice-President, and five college Deans, a decree was sent forth to department chairpersons that they and their respective faculty should engage in that nefarious nostrum of program assessment. The announcement of the proposed task produced a response that might be more accurately described as a reverberation felt throughout the department. Simultaneous shock waves echoed in numerous other departments making the announcement an occasion akin to a day on the San Andreas fault. A reaction of such intensity in department members already overloaded with teaching, writing, advising, and directing responsibilities may be understandable and, possibly, like those in similar institutions around the country, given the negative tenor surrounding many evaluation procedures.

Ohio Northern University, founded in 1871, is a private institution with an enrollment of 2,900 students in four undergraduate colleges of engineering, pharmacy, business administration, arts and sciences, and a graduate college of law. Twelve degree programs are offered, ten at the bachelor's level, the Juris Doctor, and the Doctor of Pharmacy. Major programs are offered in over fifty areas including thirty-two teacher certification programs. The instructional faculty totaled 240 in 1994-95 with 190 full-time. More than eighty percent hold the doctorate or the highest terminal degree in their field. Professional accreditation is held by the college of law (the Association of American Law Schools and the American Bar Association), the college of pharmacy (the American Council on Pharmaceutical Education), and the college of engineering (the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology). The college of business administration is in candidacy status with the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of

Business. The teacher education program is accredited by NCATE and individual departments in arts and sciences, such as chemistry and music, are accredited by national organizations.

Defining Assessment at ONU

As a private institution Ohio Northern University is not subject to the dictates for assessment from a state board of education. Assessment procedures have been built into the institutional structure; however, in 1994-1995, a more intense examination occurred following suggestions for review from the North Central Accreditation Association. At ONU, assessment involves the process of self-examination by the college faculties, assisted by the Office of Institutional Research, to determine if the University is meeting the mission and the goals of the institution and individual colleges and the learning outcomes of the particular programs and majors. Feedback from testing and analysis is used to change and refine programs and courses and thus to improve student learning and achievement. A starting point is the mission statement of the University and the mission statements of the colleges.

University Mission Statement

> *Ohio Northern University, a United Methodist-related institution of higher learning, seeks to educate and graduate students accomplished in scholastic achievement, prepared for a useful life and meaningful career, inspired with a desire to contribute to the good of mankind consistent with Judeo-Christian ideals and committed to a quality of life that will result in maximum personal and social worth.*
>
> *Ohio Northern's purpose is to help students develop into self-reliant, mature men and women capable of clear and logical thinking and sensitive to the higher values of truth, beauty and goodness. In keeping with this goal, students will be exposed to diverse ideas and influences, including those of professional programs, which broaden and strengthen the college experience and help to prepare them for later life.*

Dynamics of the University Assessment Plan

Assessment of student learning outcomes at Ohio Northern University is built upon a decentralized approach initiated at the level of the individual major program. Each department, or college where there may be no departments, has responsibility for expression of its program goal for student achievement which must be derived from and consistent with the University and respective college and department mission statements.

The highest tier in the University's assessment structure is the University Assessment Committee. Membership on this committee includes representatives from each of the five colleges , a Student Senate representative, Academic Affairs Office representatives including institutional research, representatives from the Student Affairs Office including the director of career placement, a representative from University Council, and a representative from the Admission's Office. The University Assessment Committee is responsible for the review of all college and university assessment data. Its membership ensures that information on student learning outcomes and academic achievement is available beyond that produced by major program assessment of student learning outcomes. For example, the Career Placement Office provides employer information on graduate preparation for initial employment positions. Also, Institutional Research generates periodic surveys on alumni attitudes which allow direct input from graduates on the educational experience they had during their period of study at the University.

The University Assessment Committee monitors that the college committees are engaged in the necessary dialogue with the faculty to ensure that what is learned from the multiple assessment measures of student learning outcomes is regularly considered and acted upon to improve pedagogy, revise curricula, and realize mission goals. College committees report to the University committee each term. Materials used in major program assessment are used to demonstrate that stated learning outcomes are being satisfactorily achieved and continuous improvement occurs. The University mission statement is considered as the fundamental benchmark to assess success in realizing educational outcomes. This same review serves as the mechanism to suggest means by which curriculum committees and faculty may improve program offerings and student academic achievement.

What is conceptualized are ongoing, regular exchanges and reporting among the University Committee, college assessment and curriculum committees, and faculty delivering the educational programs. The University plan must have its decentralized character incorporating individual college plans due to the unique missions of the five colleges. All program goals and learning outcomes are ultimately derived from the commonality of the University mission statement.

Assessment Purposes

The internal continuing examination of ONU's mission and goals is designed to ensure that the University is continuously evaluating its programs in the light of its mission. This examination process involves identifying benchmarks, analyzing

strengths and weaknesses of the programs, providing feedback to departments and colleges of study results, utilization of this data by the departments and colleges to improve courses, programs, majors, and teaching methodology in order to effect continuous improvement.

Review of academic programs includes college curricular review, results of external testing, information provided through internal benchmark testing, and comparison of testing results with programs goals. The review also includes study of the relationship of advising and outreach programs in the departments and colleges with anticipated cognitive, behavioral and affective learning outcomes. The review further includes evaluation of whether standards set by the units have been met and whether these compare with standards set by outside professional groups.

Information gathered through institutional research studies as well as studies and results provided by external testing sources are provided to departments and colleges. This information is then used to redesign courses/programs, with the aim of improving student recruitment, retention, and graduation rates. The focus is on continued quality assessment with ongoing, benchmark centered evaluations, followed by departmental and college committee analyses of data which results in problem identification and solution during an academic year or during a longer self-study period. Yearly review of programs during the process of developing the catalog, schedule, and materials for several self-studies has resulted in quality improvements in university programs each year. Information obtained from alumni studies and yearly reviews by department and colleges of changing academic needs of the various professional and academic programs is used to restructure faculty and staff development programs at the university and in the colleges.

The College of Arts and Sciences Assessment Committee

At the second tier of the assessment structure are the respective college assessment committees, and for purposes of this paper the focus at that level will be on the College of Arts and Sciences Assessment Committee. That committee consists of seven members: the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; one representative from the Committee on Professional Evaluation, the Committee on Planning and Development, the Committee on Faculty Welfare, the Committee on Curriculum; the North Central Association Self-Study Committee; and two student representatives appointed by the Dean.

As with the overall University assessment plan, the College of Arts and Sciences assessment plan uses its mission statement as a starting point. That statement sets forth the educational goals of the college.

College of Arts and Sciences Mission Statement

The Getty College of Arts and Sciences is a community of students and faculty committed to academic, moral, and spiritual development. The rich diversity of studies available in the college challenges community members to develop personal goals and to discover means of achieving them.

The educational program of the college provides a coherent framework that equips each student to flourish in a world of rapidly changing conditions. Academic growth will be demonstrated through achieving special proficiency in the student's major field or fields of study. Specific cognitive goals include knowledge of the origins and content of contemporary culture, effective communication based on logical thinking, competence in quantitative reasoning, a rational approach to the physical and biological world, and sensitivity to artistic expression. This foundation for lifelong learning is designed to equip students to function as free persons in a free society and to support personal commitment to ethical and religious ideals that are vital for humanity.

In line with its mission statement, the College of Arts and Sciences has adopted an assessment plan which provides for regular monitoring of the educational process.

Basic College Assessment Plan

The academic progress of each individual student is subject to a periodic review. Each department does a careful review of sophomore majors to ascertain their ability and promise for success and professional development within the program. Most major programs also assess certain behavioral patterns which include written and oral communication skills, problem solving, interpersonal skills and general career preparation. The Dean and/or Assistant Dean assist sophomore general studies students in determining a course of study which will lead to successful completion of a college degree. Early in the junior year, all students are expected to file a graduation check sheet. This process allows for departments and the college as a whole to determine if each student is accomplishing the educational goals of his/her program. It also enables appropriate adjustment prior to graduation application during the senior year when all general and major requirements along with the desired learning outcomes are ascertained.

The Committee on Curriculum reviews the effectiveness of the general education program on a regular basis. The committee meets monthly during the academic year, and matters pertaining to general education may be reviewed at any meeting. In any case, the committee does a comprehensive review and evaluation of general education at intervals

no less than every five years. All instructors are asked to submit course syllabi and are also asked to ascertain which teaching/learning styles are active in the particular course. The overall goal of this portion of the assessment plan is to ensure that general education remains broad-based in appropriate subject matter and current in exposing students to the different modes of learning. The intent of the college is that students within their total education experience should realize the benefits derived from a variety of classroom styles such as lecture, discussion, seminar, collaborative learning, laboratory experience, processing of experimental or other data, and personal performance.

Appropriate student surveys are conducted in cooperation with the Office of Institutional Research. These surveys play a major role in assessing the effectiveness of the overall educational program. An initial survey is completed by the freshmen and a second one is completed at the end the junior year. The latter one provides formative data while the students' education program is still in progress. This is followed by a survey of the same students shortly after graduation. Additional post-graduation surveys, e.g., at 3-5 and 10-15 years, are also accomplished with the same group of students enabling the college to gain useful information on the long-range effectiveness of each student's college education as it impacted upon their professionalism and career development. It also provides a means of obtaining the student's perception of his/her attainment of affective and behavioral goals. In each survey the participants are carefully tracked and follow-up contacts are made as necessary. This technique is now producing response rates in the 50-60% range.

Certain programs within the college have a significant number of students participating in national competitive exams. Some of these provide general overview, others are discipline specific, and still others provide for assessment of both the general and the specific. In most cases behavioral skills, attitudes, and general awareness of interpersonal relationships are measured. The college assessment plan calls for review of the data supplied on behalf of Ohio Northern University students through the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), and the Medical College Aptitude Test (MCAT). The results of these exams are reviewed respectively by appropriate department chairs, Prelaw Advisory Committee, and Premedical Sciences Advisory Committee. In each case the results are shared with the Dean of the college in order to determine if any adjustments in curricular programming are appropriate.

Some departments, teacher education and chemistry, for example, administer national standardized subject matter exams in conjunction with appropriate courses or programs. Other departments have access to similar exams and may choose to use them

as appropriate to their overall course and departmental goals when this can be accomplished at a reasonable cost. Each department is expected to provide the Dean with a summation of any and all standardized exam results as part of the annual departmental report.

Each department/program maintains the integrity of its major through regular review. Whenever a significant change is appropriate, that change is subject to review by the Dean, the Committee on Curriculum, and the college faculty as a whole. A major assessment of the total quality of each major program is accomplished by having each student complete a senior capstone experience. This provides an excellent measure of the student's overall preparation by requiring him/her to engage in professional-level scholarship, research, practicum, or performance as a final part of the major course of study. The college plan allows for each unit within the college to define the student activity/project as appropriate to the discipline. In each case a tangible measurement of the student's achievement of the overall academic, attitudinal and behavioral goals is accomplished. Each department has placed this information on file in the Dean's office and in cooperation with that office ascertains the completion and quality of the senior capstone as part of the final graduation approval process.

The College of Arts and Sciences has in place a comprehensive faculty evaluation plan which provides regular assessment of teaching effectiveness, program development, individual service to the educational commitment of the university and professional development. The plan includes evaluation by faculty peers and students in addition to the department chairs. The evaluation plan is, in effect, the foundation upon which a highly effective tenured faculty can be developed as evidenced by the fact that the criteria designated in the evaluation plan are carefully considered by the Committee on Professional Evaluation in determining faculty promotion and continuing/tenured contracts.

College Program Outcomes

All degree-seeking students are required to complete a general education program which provides for basic understanding of and competence in many areas of human endeavor and thought. At the same time, each student is required to attain certain learning outcomes which enable him/her to fulfill the primary goals of the college missions statement. Through participation in and completion of the general education program, students should be able to:

1. actively engage in the academic, societal, and cultural atmosphere of the university.
2. communicate effectively in both written and oral form.
3. exhibit computer literacy.
4. solve quantitative problems.
5. examine the role of science and use critical thinking skills in problem solving and application.
6. appreciate the fine arts and examine the role of the arts in the human experience.
7. investigate social issues and the forces that drive social interactions that take place in the world.
8. value cultural diversity.
9. explore and appreciate the role of the humanities in understanding human existence, including its religious dimension.
10. participate in and value the importance of individual wellness, fitness, and recreational activities.

With these outcomes in mind, the basic assessment plan provides for regular evaluation of the effectiveness of the total educational package with the College of Arts and Sciences. It provides ongoing opportunities to maintain the strength of programs, for making adjustments when appropriate, and for fulfilling the mission of the college.

Department of Communication Arts Assessment

At the third tier/level of the assessment structure are the sixteen departments in the College of Arts and Sciences offering forty-five majors or concentrations. The Department of Communication Arts evolved from the erstwhile Department of Speech and Theatre which itself found roots in a School of Elocution in the 1800s. Currently the department offers a major in Communication Arts with concentrations in Speech Communication, Public Relations, Telecommunications, Theatre, and Musical Theatre. Since 1985, the ten students majoring in Speech and Theatre has expanded to 113 students in one or more of the concentrations in 1995. The department also provides service courses for the University and college General Education requirements of public speaking and interpersonal communication for over 600 students annually. In addition, upper-level courses in persuasive speaking, business and professional speaking, interviewing, group communication, and argumentation are required for students in management, marketing, international business, pre-law programs, and sport management, for example. Nine full-time faculty and three full-time non-teaching staff members (for costuming, technical theatre, and cable TV), and two-to-three guest artists/instructors per quarter supervise/oversee the department's five concentrations and co-curricular programs and productions.

Department of Communication Arts Mission Statement

Again, as with the overall University and the College of Arts and Sciences assessment plans, the Department of Communication Arts uses its mission statement as a starting point.

> *The communication arts major is designed to fulfill the Ohio Northern University and Getty College of Arts and Sciences missions by producing scholars who are prepared for a lifetime of learning in a diverse and changing world. Graduates will be prepared for entry level positions in the professional areas of Telecommunications, Public Relations, Theatre, Musical Theatre, and Speech Communication. Teacher Education candidates will model for and enable their students to become autonomous learners capable of contributing both individually and collectively to the larger society. Other options open to graduates may also include graduate programs for specialized study.*

Department of Communication Arts Assessment Plan

The assessment plan for the Department of Communication Arts was an ambiguous, amorphous, ambivalent entity that faculty and staff members thought existed, but, in actuality, had never been fully articulated. The spring decree brought the department members together to carefully analyze the situation. Each concentration area focused on its specialized needs and developed coordinated plans for the assessment of Telecommunications, Public Relations, Theatre, Musical Theatre, and Speech Communication. Thus, by late spring, each concentration had the rudiments of an assessment plan in place. Since each area has a small number of faculty, members worked as area sub-committees to develop respective plans which were then approved by the department faculty as a whole. There now exist five distinct assessment plans for Telecommunications, Public Relations, Theatre, Musical Theatre, and Speech Communication. However, as distinct as they may be they are all coordinated and governed by the general mission of the department.. The following material focuses only on the assessment plan for the concentration in Speech Communication.

Speech Communication Concentration Assessment Plan

Goal Statement:

The student selecting a Concentration in Speech Communication will:

1. Be firmly grounded in knowledge of subject matter
2. Employ effective human communication skills
3. Assess and analyze communication appropriate to career goals in graduate studies, in employment, and in the larger society

Learning Outcomes:

Knowledge of Subject Matter:

1. Identify major theories of human communication
2. Demonstrate understanding of theory
3. Demonstrate application of theory
4. Demonstrate knowledge of course content

Human Communication Skills:

1. Employ effective outline techniques
2. Demonstrate proficiency in writing
3. Demonstrate proficiency in speaking
4. Demonstrate proficiency in interpersonal encounters
4. Demonstrate proficiency in listening
5. Demonstrate proficiency in nonverbal communication

Assess/Analyze Communication:

1. Evaluate public communication events
2. Select appropriate interpersonal strategies
3. Analyze assumptions, evidence, and conclusions of an argument
4. Design appropriate messages based on audience/situation analysis

Assessment of Learning Outcomes:

Goal Related Objectives	Methods of Evaluation
Knowledge of Subject Matter	Examination, Internship Experience, Classroom Performance, Written Assignments, Oral Assignments
Human Communication Skills	Classroom Performance, Written Assignments, Oral Assignments, Cooperative Learning Projects
Assess/Analyze Communication	Examination, Capstone Experience, Oral Assignments, Written Assignments, Internship Experience

Assessment Benchmarks:

1. Sophomore year review
2. Junior year checklist of unfulfilled requirements
3. Successful completion of senior capstone experience
4. Minimum 2.0 (C) grades in concentration requirements

Program Evaluation:

1. Student course evaluations (quarterly)
2. Follow-up contact of graduates (ongoing)
3. Departmental long range plans submitted to Dean (annually)

Results of Program Evaluations:

Program goals and objectives are assessed through self-study.

As part of the assessment, a matrix of specific Learning Outcomes and listing of each course in the speech communication area was developed to see if the specified outcomes were being met in the individual courses.

Matrix for Assessment

The following matrix indicates in which courses the goal related objectives were being met.

	121-Argumentation	150-Intro to Telecommunications	211-Public Speaking	212-Business & Prof. Speaking	221-Interviewing	225-Interpersonal Comm	230-Communication Theory	241-Oral Interpretation	311-Advanced Public Address	321-Group Communication	421-Rhetoric of Politics	240-Parliamentary Procedure	340-Voice and Diction	335-Internship	499-Independent Study	Capstone Experience
KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT MATTER																
1. Identify major theories of comm.	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
2. Demonstrate understanding of theory	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
3. Demonstrate application of theory	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4. Dem. knowledge of course content	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
5. Keep current in discipline	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
HUMAN COMMUNICATION SKILLS																
1. Employ effective outline techniques	X		X	X	X				X	X						
2. Demonstrate proficiency in writing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
3. Demonstrate proficiency in speaking	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4. Demonstrate prof. in interpersonal comm	X		X	X	X	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X
5. Demonstrate proficiency in listening	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6. Demonstrate prof. in nonverbal comm	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ASSESS/ANALYZE COMMUNICATION																
1. Evaluate public communication events	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Select appropriate interps. strategies	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3. Analyze assumptions, evidence, and conclusions of an argument	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4. Design appropriate message based on audience/situation analysis	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

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Assessment Observations

What appeared in early spring to be a "painful encounter" replete with expressions of dismay and disgust became an opportunity, not only for faculty in the speech communication area, but also for the entire department, to more closely "take stock" of itself in behavioral objective terms. What had merely been assumed took some tangible form. Departmental faculty are well aware that what has been produced needs expansion and refinement. Learning outcomes can be extended to delineate more clearly the goal-related objectives. More assessment benchmarks can be developed, and program evaluation can further take form through "in-house" measuring instruments in each of the five concentrations to evaluate the extent of majors' mastery of material and skills. The faculty wish to maintain control of this third level of assessment and recognize that there are no standard tests in the five concentrations, so evaluation must come from within.

The departmental assessment has indicated the need for better communication and evaluation of the program by alumni. Engendering contact with former students is not the most pleasant of tasks because present locations and employment for many is not known. Arrangements with the Career Placement Office will improve strategies in that area.

The assessment has also revealed the need to restructure the speech communication concentration as an area of study. Marketing of the field and potential placement of graduates as a selling point to obtain future majors has not been successful. Therefore, the faculty revised the present curriculum and developed a replacement concentration entitled Professional and Organizational Communication. The new concentration embraces many of the existing communication courses and adds new courses in organizational communication, communication and conflict management, issues in communication, and as a possible elective, health communication. The concentration also includes business courses in marketing, management, economics, and a sociology course in work and the organization. With the new concentration also comes a new minor in Professional and Organizational Communication, thus, expanding department offerings to a wide variety of students throughout the University. Interest has been expressed by both faculty and students in engineering, pharmacy, marketing, management, sport management, political science, etc. The creation of a health communication course has sparked particular interest for majors in sport medicine, health education, and pharmacy practice. Development of a health communication minor is seen as a distinct possibilty for the future.

With the approval of the concentration by the college Committee on Curriculum, the college Dean, and Academic Vice-President, the new concentration will be inaugurated in the fall of 1996. This development, which has occurred because of the spring assessment, is permitting communication faculty to expand their interests into "new" areas of study and teaching, is allowing minimal or no increase in numbers of faculty because of alternate year offerings with current low enrollment courses in the department, and is offering students a concentration or minor that may prepare them far better for a position in the workplace.

The assessment is seen as an ongoing activity, not one to be completed at "x" point and then put away and forgotten. The faculty realizes that there is a tri-level structure to the assessment plan of the University and can now coordinate their efforts with those in other departments and colleges. The initial onus of assessment as imposition and threat has, indeed, become an opportunity for faculty and students to engage in a most productive endeavor.

=Background information for this paper was provided by the *ONU Assessment Plan*, June 30, 1995, Vol. I and II, Ada, OH: Ohio Northern University.